



Hendry County Sheriff's Office

General Order 5.14

TITLE: Media Relations	SHERIFF'S APPROVAL: Digital
ORIGINATION DATE: August 5, 2018	REVISION DATE: May 14, 2019
RELATED REFERENCES: <i>Chapter 119 F.S.,</i>	
CFA: 1.06, 1.07M	
REVIEW FREQUENCY: 3 YEARS	DATE OF NEXT REVIEW: May 14, 2022

I. PURPOSE: The purpose of this order is to establish guidelines for members communicating with the media.

II. SCOPE: This order shall apply to all sheriff's office members.

III. POLICY: The Sheriff's Office is committed to keeping the general public well informed on the activities of this agency. Maintaining open lines of communications with the media is an important means of achieving an informed public. Each employee of the agency shall be committed to maintaining a cooperative and harmonious professional relationship with representatives of the news media.

IV. PROCEDURE:

A. Public Information

1. The Public Information Officer (PIO) acts as the public information coordinator, facilitating the flow of information to the news media. It is the PIOs responsibility to:
 - a. Coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning victims, witnesses, suspects, and confidential investigations and operations in accordance with *Chapter 119, Florida Statutes*
 - b. Prepare and distribute news releases and social media
 - c. Arrange for and assist with news conferences
 - d. Assist news media representatives covering routine news and at major incident scenes.
2. When the PIO is unavailable, designated employees may respond or release information to the news media.
3. In the event of communication between media representatives and any agency employee, it is the responsibility of the employee to notify their supervisor as soon as practical, who will in turn

notify the PIO of the contact, content of communication and originator of information relayed to the media. All employee contacts with the media are to be communicated to the PIO on the same working day.

B. News and Other Releases

1. The following information may be made available to the news media in criminal matters, with the exception of the location if (1) it identifies the victim of a sex offense or child abuse or (2) it is the home or work address of a victim of aggravated stalking, harassment, aggravated battery, or domestic violence, when the victim has requested confidentiality in writing; per Florida Statutes 119.071(2)(h)4(j). Such a request invokes a five-year period of confidentiality.
 - a. The accused/arrested person's name (if an adult), age, and charges.
 - b. The time, date, location and nature of the reported crime.
 - c. The circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest, including the time and place of arrest, resistance, pursuit, possession and use of weapons and a description of items seized at the time of arrest.
 - d. The name of any victim, address, age, and sex.
 - e. Any other information the PIO deems relevant to the news release.
 - f. The arrestee's Hendry County criminal history may be released if it is not obtained from FCIC/NCIC
2. News releases concerning incidents involving agency policy, the official interpretation of agency policy or investigations of an internal nature will be made by the Sheriff or his designee.
3. In situations involving offenses or events that have occurred in multiple jurisdictions, the Sheriff's Office may coordinate the news release.
4. Inmate Photos
 - a. Photographs of individuals currently housed at the Jail can be obtained from the Hendry County Sheriff's Office Website. The Website is updated every 24 hours.
 - b. If the photo is not available on the Website, the PIO will coordinate the release of other inmate booking photos during regular business hours.
 - c. If, because of time constraints or equipment malfunction, and inmate photos cannot be transmitted electronically, the photos are to be made available for pick-up by the media.
5. 911 Recordings
 - a. Upon a request from the news media for a specified 911 recording, the PIO will relay the request to the Communications Section.
 - b. The Communications section will arrange for the duplication of the requested 911 recording.
 - c. When the duplicates are ready for pick-up, the Communications section will provide to the PIO who in turn will notify the news representatives who requested the 911 recording.

d. This process will be carried out as expeditiously as reasonably possible.

6. Juvenile Offender Information

a. Information concerning juvenile offenders, including arrest reports and photographs, may be released if:

1. The juvenile has been taken into custody for a violation of law, which if committed by an adult, would be a felony.

2. The juvenile has been found by a court to have committed at least three (3) or more violations of law, which if committed by an adult, would be misdemeanors.

b. All records of juvenile traffic violations are open to inspection and publication in the same manner as adult traffic violations.

7. Information Relating to Fast-Breaking Events

a. When inquiries are directed to the Telecommunications Center or any Sheriff's Office employee concerning fast-breaking events, the employee is to acknowledge the occurrence of the event, provide the location of the event and notify the PIO.

C. Information Not To Be Released

1. This section does not apply to the release of information and records to other law enforcement agencies or in response to a judicial order. In accordance with F.S. 119.01, the following information is exempted from public disclosure and is not to be released:

a. Information that might jeopardize the successful conclusion or the subsequent prosecution of an investigation. Unless approved by the lead agent or supervisor, employees are not to release information concerning ongoing investigations for which they do not have ultimate responsibility. This includes the results of any examinations or tests of the accused and the identity, testimony, or credibility of a prospective witness.

b. The identity of any suspect prior to arrest or the results of any investigative procedures except to the extent necessary to aid in the investigation, to assist in apprehension of the suspect, or to warn the public of danger.

c. Any opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the accused; the prior criminal record, character or reputation of a suspect; the merits of the case; or the evidence in the case.

d. Information from FCIC/NCIC or from Baker Act cases.

e. Any information revealing the substance of a confession by a person arrested until such time as the case is finally determined by adjudication, dismissal, or other final disposition.

f. The possibility of a plea of guilty to the offense charged or to a lesser offense.

g. Any information (including the photograph, name, address or other information) that reveals the identity of the victim of any sex offense or child abuse.

h. The home address, telephone number, photograph, social security number, date of birth and place of employment of active or former Sheriff's Office employees, their spouses and children, and the names and locations of schools or day care facilities attended by the children

of active or former Sheriff's Office employees (unless consent is given by the employee). However, if a present or former employee of the agency is arrested, **only** his or her name, photograph and charge may be released to the media unless written.

- i. The identity of persons killed or seriously injured prior to notification of next of kin.
- j. Confidential information received from another law enforcement agency.
- k. Information revealing the identity of confidential informants or describing surveillance techniques.

D. News Conferences

1. Sheriff's Office employees wishing to hold a news conference are to contact the PIO, who will then make the arrangements. News conferences should be announced to all interested news organizations in the area.
2. In most cases, the Sheriff, Chief Deputy, Captain, Lieutenant, and/or the deputy/investigator in charge of the case, or other knowledgeable employees are to be present to provide additional background information.
3. Media representatives may receive appropriate press packets.

E. High Profile Media Situations

1. During high profile media situations within the Sheriff's Office jurisdiction, the PIO should coordinate and release information to the public and news media using the most expedient and available method of communication.
2. On location at a scene involving a major crime, incident, or disaster the supervisor in charge should designate a news media briefing area outside the scene perimeter as soon as practical so that media personnel do not interfere with law enforcement or emergency operations.
3. Keeping in mind the purpose of a secure scene and considering the tactical situation, the supervisor in charge should try to make an effort to provide news photographers access to the scene. News photographers may be escorted into secure areas if safe and appropriate.
4. When news media representatives are permitted in the area of a scene, they do not have the authority to be within a scene or area that was secured to preserve evidence, at any location where their presence jeopardizes law enforcement operations, or on private property (e.g., apartment, single-family house) without the consent of the owner or lessee.
5. At the scene of any event of public interest, the news media may conduct interviews, take photographs, and otherwise perform their assigned tasks provided their activity is not in violation of the guidelines established in this Procedure, and provided such activity does not interfere with law enforcement operations. If the PIO is not on-scene, the supervisor in charge at the scene may provide information and grant interviews to the media or designates a knowledgeable on-scene alternate to do so. Contact with the media is to be communicated to the PIO on the same working day.
6. **Photographing and Interviewing the Accused**
 - a. Employees are not to deliberately pose any person in custody for news photographers.

- b. Employees are not to permit any person in custody to be interviewed unless the interview was requested by a recognized news organization and the accused agrees to the request. Interviews of persons in custody are to be limited to one hour of actual interview time unless Jail officials or the Sheriff expands the time. Interviews are scheduled at the earliest possible convenience.
- c. Nothing herein is to be construed to prohibit the accused and/or his attorney from issuing a denial of guilt.
- d. Nothing herein will be construed to prevent the news media from taking whatever candid photographs they are able to take of individuals or events without interfering with the agency.

F. Media Requests for Public Records

- 1. In the event that the media submits a public records request, the schedule of fees is the same as those stated in *General Order 5.15 - Records*. If the document is 10 pages or less, the Records Unit may electronically transmit the information to the requesting media.
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V. GLOSSARY

CONFIDENTIAL – Means not be shared with persons or released without the express, written consent of the individual concerned. Limits to confidentiality apply in certain circumstances, as defined by law.

HIGH PROFILE MEDIA SITUATION – Means a situation involving any scene requiring a set perimeter; communication, computer, and/or electrical system failures; destruction of or significant damage to a Sheriff's Office facility; natural disaster; or threats against the Sheriff's Office.

JUVENILE (CHILD) – Any unmarried person under the age of eighteen (18) alleged to be dependent; Any person who is charged with a violation of law occurring prior to the time that person reached the age of eighteen (18) years of age.

PUBLIC RECORDS – Section 119.011(1), F.S., defines public records as: "All documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, data processing software, or other material, regardless of physical form, characteristics or means of transmission, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any agency". Examples of public records include memorandum, and preliminary working drafts communicated to other employees of the Sheriff's Office for review. When in doubt as to whether your e-mail is a public record consult the Sheriff's Records Section.

Your electronic signature in Power DMS acknowledges you have read this policy and understand it.